



# Itzhak Perlman

Korngold: Concerto in D

Conus: Concerto in E minor

# André Previn

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra





DS-37770

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The two works in this album were written by gentlemen who were sorcerers of melody.

Now melody, of course, amongst the creators of the most prevalent new music of the past decade or so, has become so archaic a concept that, for very young listeners, the term itself may have to be explained. Melody, by definition, means the arrangement of musical tones of varying pitch in a pleasing sequence to produce a rhythmic whole. Ah, yes — the lad in the third row has a question. What's that, young fellow? What does pitch mean? Please. Consult your dictionary.

Erich Wolfgang Korngold (1897-1957) grew up in a Vienna which still echoed the lilting music of the Strausses and rang anew with the songfulness of their successors in Viennese opera, operetta and symphony. Melody, if we are to believe the legend, sparkled from the trees, rebounded from the sunbeams, and waltzed gloriously from the very gutters. The child Erich heard it all from the best possible vantage point. Both his parents were musical. His father, in fact, from 1902 was the prestigious critic of Vienna's *Neue Freie Presse*, who stepped into that position as Richard Heuberger stepped out.

At the age of five, Erich played four-hand piano with Korngold Sr. At seven, he composed short songs and waltzes. At nine, he performed his cantata "Gold" for an astonished Gustav Mahler.

When the boy was eleven, the Vienna Court Opera presented a command performance of his dance pantomime "The Snowman" before the Emperor Franz Josef. In the next four years, the young prodigy composed an Overture for Orchestra, a Sinfonietta, a violin sonata, two piano sonatas, a piano trio, and numerous shorter works.

German musicologist Hermann Kretschmar described the child as "even among the most extraordinary cases of musical precocity, a phenomenal one." Richard Strauss professed himself filled with "awe and apprehension at so precocious a manifestation of genius," and Puccini remarked, "That boy's talent is so great, he could easily give us half and still have enough left for himself!"

Fritz Kreisler, Artur Schnabel, Carl Flesch, Alfred Cortot and other performers added Erich's works to their repertoires. Conductors Nikisch, Weingartner, Mengelberg, Richard Strauss, Bruno Walter and Sir Henry Wood included his orchestral compositions in their programs. Schumann, Lehmann, Jeritzta, Tauber, Kiepurá and Slezak sang his vocal works.

In 1920, Korngold's operas "The Ring of Polycrates," "Violanta" and "The Dead City" were being produced in countless opera houses. Then and for a decade afterward, he was the idol of Vienna and the youthful hero of its youth. In 1927, Korngold brought about a revival of Strauss's operettas with his adaptation of "One Night in Venice." In 1929 he collaborated with producer-director Max Reinhardt in a new version of "Die Fledermaus" (later staged on Broadway as "Rosalinda").

In 1934, Reinhardt was in Hollywood filming Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream." He invited Korngold to join him to adapt and conduct Mendelssohn's music for the score. So assured and innovative was Korngold's work that Warner Bros. urged him to stay on at the studio. He finally agreed to a contract that obliged him to score only three films of his own choosing every two years, with the freedom to return to Vienna for at least six months a year, and with the rights to his film compositions reverting to him for any future use he might wish to make of them.

Initially, Korngold divided his time between California and Vienna. In 1938, however, as the Nazi threat to all Europe grew intense, he brought

his wife and sons, his father, mother and brother to the States and settled there permanently.

Korngold plunged into film composing with the same seriousness of purpose he brought to his concert works. In his dozen-odd years in Hollywood, he restructured film music and composed eighteen scores which are among the finest ever written for motion pictures. Korngold brought to the screen a stirring and gorgeous symphonic sound, an endless flow of inspired melody, long-lined development, and a distinctly personal gift for arresting harmonies. Soon he was the best-known composer in Hollywood. The industry honored him with two Academy Awards (for "Anthony Adverse" and "The Adventures of Robin Hood"). Symphony orchestras performed suites drawn from his motion picture scores.

In 1947, Korngold put motion pictures resolutely behind him, to return to composing for the concert hall. The next decade brought, among other works, his Symphonic Serenade for Strings (premiered by Furtwängler), his Symphony in F-sharp, and the premiere of his Violin Concerto. Each new Korngold work bore his unmistakable hallmarks: stunning use of orchestral forces coupled with sublime melody.

Korngold had composed his D major concerto for violin in the summer of 1945, dedicating it to Alma Mahler Werfel (Gustav Mahler's widow who married writer Franz Werfel). Jascha Heifetz premiered it in St. Louis on February 15, 1947, with the St. Louis Symphony conducted by Vladimir Golschmann. Newspapers on the following day reported that the concerto received the most enthusiastic ovation in St. Louis concert history. One critic predicted that the Korngold concerto would endure as long as the Mendelssohn. Heifetz subsequently played it in Carnegie Hall, New York, in Chicago, Los Angeles and other musical centers, and he recorded it in 1953 in a monophonic performance that is still acclaimed.

Through the years the Korngold concerto has won a devoted following for whom there can never be enough performances or recordings, for whom this new recorded performance by Itzhak Perlman, André Previn and the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, in crystalline Digital sound, will be the realization of a long-held wish. Audiences have ever responded warmly to the concerto. Critical opinion has characteristically been divided. For a segment of the nation's reviewers, Korngold's stint in Hollywood was a questionable association. The concerto, in particular, came under fire because its development was rhapsodical rather than in strict classical form — and because Korngold unapologetically employed as the concerto's major motifs four themes from his film scores.

The haunting first statement of the first movement is from "Another Dawn," a 1937 pic-

ture distinguished only by Korngold's memorable music. It is introduced by the soloist in a 29 bar exposition, and later taken up by the orchestra. The A major second theme, gentle and yearning, is from 1939's "Juarez." After a restatement of the first subject, the second theme returns in D, and the movement ends rapturously.

The main theme of the second movement (Romance) is from 1936's "Anthony Adverse." In the middle section, marked *poco meno (misterrioso)*, the solo violin is played with a mute.

The final movement, opening with a lively staccato jig and ending in a brilliant virtuoso climax, utilizes the bright and happy main theme from "The Prince and the Pauper" of 1937.

Korngold was later to use a theme from 1939's "The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex" in his Symphony in F-sharp. Thus did the composer preserve beautiful melodies which, in the pre-television era when films played for perhaps three months and then disappeared into the studio vaults, it seemed certain would otherwise be permanently lost.

That Julius Conus also was adept at lovely, long-lined melody we have the evidence of his Violin Concerto in E minor, and little else. A violinist, Conus wrote other, shorter pieces for his instrument, but these are virtually unheard today.

Conus was a Russian, born into a fascinating family of French musicians who had migrated to Russia at the time of the Napoleonic Wars. Two of Julius's brothers also were musicians. All three studied at Moscow Conservatory under Taneyev and Arensky, and all three stayed on to teach there. Georgi Conus (1862-1933), the eldest, had marked influence upon such students as Scriabin and Glière. For a time, much was expected of Georgi as a composer. Tchaikovsky thought so highly of his promise that he obtained for him the Tsar's annual stipend of 1200 rubles awarded to deserving musicians. Georgi did indeed compose songs, a ballet, a cantata, two symphonic poems, and a variety of other instrumental works. None of these have entered the international repertoire, and Georgi ultimately became more and more immersed in musical academics, formulating an abstruse system he called "metro-techtonic analysis" for the scientific measurement of symmetry in musical forms.

Leo Conus (1871-1944) was a classmate of Sergei Rachmaninoff's in Arensky's course in advanced composition. He headed Moscow Conservatory's piano department for a number of years and achieved a sturdy reputation in Russia as a concert pianist. In 1921, Leo left the USSR to reside for a time in Paris. In 1936, he moved on to the United States, settling in Cincinnati where he remained as a teacher until his death at 73.

Julius (sometimes Yuly, Jules or Julien)

Conus was born in Moscow in 1869. In 1888 he took a Gold Medal at Moscow Conservatory and taught there until 1895. He also concertized, both as a soloist and as a chamber musician, appearing sometimes in a Trio or other ensemble with Rachmaninoff to play the latter's compositions. Rachmaninoff dedicated his two pieces (Op. 6) for violin and piano to Julius and the two men remained warm friends throughout their lives. (In 1932 Julius's son Boris and Rachmaninoff's daughter Tatiana were married and, a year later, gave their two proud fathers a grandson).

Julius, like Leo, went to Paris in 1921 to teach at the Russian Conservatory. He did not follow Leo's example in emigrating to the States however. Instead, as Hitler's Germany became a threat to all of Europe, Julius returned to his homeland. In 1942, the year of the Nazis' heavy offensive against Moscow, the continuing siege of Leningrad, the fall of Sebastopol, and the heroic defense of Stalingrad, Julius Conus died in Moscow.

Conus composed his Violin Concerto for his own use and was the soloist in its premiere performance in Moscow in 1898. In the early 1900's Fritz Kreisler took up the concerto's cause and gave it its London premiere in 1904. It was Jascha Heifetz who became the Conus Concerto's true champion. He made it a part of his repertoire for worldwide concert appearances, from 1920 onward played it on several occasions in Carnegie Hall, and with his recording of it with the RCA Symphony Orchestra under Izler Solomon in 1952, brought the work to its widest audience thus far.

Listeners invariably heard the Conus Concerto with enthusiasm. Critics as a rule dismissed it as minor, though conceding it to be a grateful vehicle for the fiddler. As with many works written by a violinist-composer, it provides the soloist with an effective showcase for brilliance and fireworks, but the Conus surpasses many another "virtuoso vehicle" in its quite ravishing songfulness.

Conus cast his work in E minor, key of the Mendelssohn concerto. Its three concise sections are played without pause: *Allegro molto; Adagio; Allegro subito*. A cadenza occurs between the latter two sections.

— RORY GUY

### SIDE ONE

KORNGOLD: VIOLIN CONCERTO IN D MAJOR, Op. 35 (23:45)  
I. Moderato nobile (8:23)  
II. Romance (8:15)  
III. Finale: Allegro assai vivace (7:07)

### SIDE TWO

CONUS (KONYUS): CONCERTO IN E MINOR (18:50)  
Allegro molto — Adagio — Cadenza — Allegro subito

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